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(1)

[1760]

SECOND THOUGHTS;
OR THE
C A S E
OF A
Limited Toleration,
Stated according to the present Exigence
of Affairs in
CHURCH and STATE.

Nihil Violentum Durat.

Since our present Condition more, than ever, Requires our being Strong, & of a Peice within our Selves; for (besides Domeltique misunderstandings) have we not powerful Neighbours Hovering over us, and perhaps Watching the Opportunities, which our Weakness and Divisions may give them? And since our want of Union, & Intestine Animositys chiefly Result from our different Judgements in Religion, and from the several Consequences thereof, I hope, I shall not mistake my duty in offering my thoughts to those, who are the Proper Judges, concerning that so much debated Question of Punishing or Tolera-ting Non-Conformists.

On this Subj & my Endeavour shall be to speak plainly, like a good English man, without any Byas of prejudice, or favour to the Persons concern'd; and, whereas many Persons of great Authority may perhaps be of a different Judgement from mine, in the Point, I am to handle, I beg the favour of my Reader to beleive, that nothing but the Interest of my Country could have Engag'd me in a Question of this Nature, in Opposition to so considerable a Party, of whose Abilites I have a very true and just Veneration.

In the first Place, it must be allow'd, that could it be effected, nothing were more to be desired, in order to the lasting Happiness of this Nation, than a Conformity of all Minds, under the same Doctrine, and Worship in Religion; That so, as our Bodys, and outward Actions are govern'd by the same Temporal Laws, our Souls and our Opinions (though in Matters relating to the World) might also be united under one, and the same Ecclesiasticall Discipline, and were *England* at present under that happy Condition of Spiritual Union, I should think it rational and seasonable by the Rigour of Laws, to preserve it in such a State of Tranquillity, by suppressing all Upstart Innovators, & frightening the People from the dangerous affectation of Novelty.

But since we enjoy this Universal Harmony only in our Wishes, (diversity of Opinions in Matters of Religious Worship having held so long a possession in the Minds of the People) & since the Cockle is so generally spread, and mingled with the Corn; that 'tis impossible wholly to root up one without apparent Danger of destroying the other, I think it behoves us to take our Measures according to the present State, and Juncture, of our Affairs, and choose that expedient, which is best for us, and withal is attainable by us in the Circumstances, we now are in, not that, which (although best in itself) is not possible for us to attain.

And here (I conceive) lyes the Root of their Mistakes, who have lately with so much Zeal opposed a Toleration: They tell us what should be, not what may be done; and deliver many Truths concerning the Beauty and Expediency of a General Uniformity; but their Discourse seems cut out, and made to fit an *Utopian* Kingdom, not *England* in its present Condition.

For according to true Policy & Reason we ought either wholly to Root out all Dissenters, or else so to Tolerate them, that they may
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live at ease and contentedness amongst us; whereby they may become, if not of the Church, at least sound Members of the Common Wealth.

Let the Opposers of a Toleration shew us a safe and ready way to rid the Nation of all Non-conformists, though I confess I am no Friend to Force and Violence, especially in Matters of Conscience, yet I should not obstruct any Cause, that would certainly produce so happy an effect: But, if this be impossible for them to do, and if the Method by them prescrib'd, and made use of, serves only to exasperate, not to carry off the peccant Humour, I must conclude, that the good of the Nation is either not rightly understood, or not justly pursued by them.

For what can be more Pernicious to the Safety of any Kingdom than to have within it self so great a Body, as all the Dissenters in England make, continually exasperated by Penalties and invaded by a legall kind of Hostility; who, thus made Enemies by the Law, must by a Natural Consequence be still watching Occasions of easing and unburthening themselves? What is this but to Nourish and Foment in our Bowels the Seeds of a Civil War, that want nothing but an Opportunity (which for Mischief too frequently presents it self) to Break forth in a consuming Flame?

Perhaps you will say, that a wholesome Violence may Cure their Obstinacy, and Reduce them to Obedience, and in time make them less Numerous, and so less Dangerous.

I answer, That Compulsion may bring many Hypocrites, but no real Converts into our Church: For Conscience is of so Spiritual a Nature, that outward Force can have no Influence, nor Dominion over it: We cannot Over-rule it in our selves, much less in others. At home in our own Breasts interest cannot Bribe it, to Judge otherwise of our own proper Actions, than according to that Light of Nature, or Grace, which God has bestowed upon it: And, although it be granted in the Case of Non-conformists that their Conscience is Erroneous, yet, as such it can never be Rectified by Fear, and Force, but only by Conviction of Judgment.

Hence it may be inferred, that nothing does more Efficaciously dispose and prepare the Minds of Men for Treason and Rebellion, than by Force to make them Act against their Conscience in matters of Religion: For they who have once overcome the Remorse of their God (which is the Case of all such Compliers without Conviction of Judgment) shall never stick at Breach of Faith with Prince

or Magistrate, when ever the like Motives of Interest or Fear shall prompt them to it: Whoever therefore shall design to Reduce so great a Multitude of differing Judgments to an Uniformity of Profession, by the way of Rigour and Infliction of penalties, can reasonably expect no better Success, than to fill the Church with Hypocrites, and the State with Subjects train'd up, and principled for Rebellion.

Of this Truth we have an Illustrious Example recorded by *Sozomen*, (*Cap. 7. Hist. Trip.*) *Constantius* Father to *Constantine* the Great, having many Christian Souldiers under his Command (himself being a *Gentile*) resolved to make Trial of their Temper, and find out amongst them, who were fit or unfit for Trust, and Employment: Accordingly calling them together, he declared that all such as would Sacrifice to his Gods, should continue in his Service, but that the Refusers should forthwith be Casheerd, and might thank his Clemency; that he proceeded no farther against them. Hereupon when some Obeyed the General, and some their Conscience; those who prefer'd Religion to their Interest, he immediately took into Favour, and Office; and the Temporizing Conformists he Excluded from all Employment; presuming (says our Authour) that such could never be Loyal to Man, who so lightly had forsaken their God.

From what has been said, We may draw this Conclusion, that where Infliction of penalties prevails in order to an exterior Conformity, in such to their Error of Judgment it adds Hypocrisie, whereby they become worse Christians and Subjects, than before; and where it does not so prevail, it lays the Foundation of a Civil War, by daily Exasperating so great a part of the Nation, or rather begins it, by continually Invading (though under Colour of Law) the Liberties and Goods of our fellow Subjects.

If it be Replyed, that although (being Prosecuted by the Law) they may be irritated, and dispos'd for mischief, yet (being Tolerated) they will encrease in Strength, and by Consequence encrease our Danger.

I answer that how great a Paradox soever it may seem at first sight, yet most true it is, that (taking the whole Body together of the dissenters, who are equally concerned in the Prosecution) they are far more dangerous and powerfull to do Mischief, when Prosecuted than when Tolerated: For when they are all in a suffering Condition they
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are united together in one Common Cause and Concern of easing themselves from the pressure they are under; and (being so different in their other Principles) this is the only point they can center in, and Knit together into a Body, and the only Band that binds them up in a Bundle. But when they are Indulged, and left Free, (the Cement of a joynt Interest being taken away) they will naturally, and necessarily fall in sunder, and remain as divided in point of Faction and party, as they are in tenets and principles.

Of this we have a fresh and convincing Example in the late Revolutions, for before the War, when all Sectaries and Nonconformists lived under the Curb and penaltys of the Law, and high Commission Court, they were all embodied together as Fellow Sufferers in the Common Cause, and appeared to the World but as one Sect, and were generally known only by the Common Name of Puritans: And to what Power and Strength they grew by this union, was too fatally known by the Famous Mischiefs they did. But afterwards (having shaken off their Fetters, and clapt them on their Masters) when they were at ease and prosperity, then did each Sect apart begin to set up its own Colours; and the Distinctions of the Presbyterians, Independents, and Quakers, grew visible to the World by their Divisions and Quarrels amongst themselves.

And I desire it may be observ'd that Monarchy and the Church were pull'd down by them at that time, when by a preceding prosecution they had been united together; and that the Church and Monarchy were then again restored when by Liberty and Prosperity those very Sects were fallen from one another and each had rankt it self in its own Canton, and Division.

But now it remains to be considered whither these Dissenters and Nonconformists in Religion, are any ways capable of being made Loyal and faithful to the Government.

I think there is but one certain Rule to resolve this, and all Cases of a like Nature: First allowing them to have common Sense, it will evidently follow that if we can make it their Interest to be good Subjects, they will not fail of being so, whoever shall assign any Security, but this, for the Peoples Allegiance, do (in my Opinion) but play with the Wind, and pay us with Words. I know, that *No Bishop no King* has past for a Fundamental Maxime with some, and that English Loyalty cannot consist but in the Church of England, as it is now establisht: And I suppose they go chiefly upon this Ground, that

that true Allegiance must proceed from a rectified Conscience, and a rectified Conscience from true Religion.

But I must begg their leave to dissent from them in this Particular.

All Men I confess, should be obedient to their Lawful Governours for Conscience sake, but all Men are not as they should be.

Man-kind in general is constantly true to nothing; but their Interest; how much that over rules Conscience in all Religions, is but too visible in the World. Yet I am far from denying, but that many may be found, who by the ty of Conscience only are sufficiently withheld from the enormous Crime of Rebellion: But since no other Person can tell (all pretending to it) who these are, and since every good Security must be apparent and visible; I think in *For-externs* we ought to exclude Conscience, or rather the pretense of it (which is all we can know of it in another) from being a sufficient warrant of Allegiance.

To retourn therefore from this Digression to my former Proposition, let Men be never so Differing in Matters of Religion, certain it is they will all agree in this point of being Constant and true to their own Interest: And therefore the great Art and Secret of Government is to make it the Peoples Interest to be True and Faithful to their Governours.

Now 'tis apparent that if all these Dissenters in Religion who at present lye under the Lash of the Law, were so far indulged, that they might live with Security of their Estates and Liberty of their Persons amongst us, and peaceably enjoy their Conscience in their own way of Religious Worship, it would be clearly their Interest to be obedient unto, and maintain that Government, under which they are so Protected: For none are so Dull, but must understand, that when they are in a quiet enjoyment of their livelihoods, if Disorders and War should come upon them, they must needs (at least the Major part of them) be greater Loosers, than Gainers; So that the Puplick Peace will now become their private Interest.

And this is the only Basis and Foundation, on which all Government can firmly be Establishd.

They who imagine that Vnity of Religion is absolutely necessary to Vnity of Interest, must needs fancy to themselves such an Extraordinary Charm, in the Peoples meeting together on Sundays in the Church, that they cannot fall out all the Week after: But we find by sad Experience that Persons of the same Religion (Witness the Wars be-

between *Sweden* and *Denmark*, *France*, and *Spain*) Quarrel no less fiercely, than others, who are most distant in their Principles of Belief: And they are Strangers in the Affairs of the World, who have not learnt, that Interest and not Religion, makes all the great Enmities, and amities both Publick and Private.

Our Neighbours of *Holland*, who are very Competent Judges in Matters relating to Publick Advantage, and Self-preservation, by their practice sufficiently shew the Consistency, and expedience of Tolerating different Religions under the same Government: *France* affords us the like Presedent; And I fear, till we follow their Example in *England* too, I fear we shall not arrive to that Plenty, and Power, which both those States at present enjoy. For Nature hath so placed this Island, that whenever we are Masters at Sea, we are Umpires of this part of the World; so that we must always Rise or Fall in Plenty, and Power, as we encrease or decay in Traffick, and Navigation. Now upon a just Calculation twill appear, that the Sea-faring Men, and the Trading Part of the Nation, dos in a great measure consist of Non-conformists; and that much of the Wealth and Stock of the Kingdom, is lodged in their Hands, who have no great Devotion for the present Liturgy, & Hierachy of the Church of *England*.

Wherefore we need go no farther to find out the cause of that general Damp upon Traffique and Commerce, than the Strictness of our Laws upon that Sort of People; by which some of them are Disabled, and others Discouraged from Employing their Industry, and their Stock for Carrying on the Trade of the Nation.

But whilst upon these Motives, I plead for a Toleration of Non-Conformists; thereby I intend no more, than a bare Exemption from Penalties, with a Liberty of Exercising their Religion under such competent Restrictions, as shall be judged Necessary, both to Secure the Publique from a Riot, and Sedition, and to put a Difference between their Conventions, and the Religious Assemblies of the Church, Established by Law.

Moreover, I think it necessary, that they should be Excluded from Offices, and places of eminent Trust, both Civil, and Ecclesiastical: Because, should they be Admitted to an Equality of Power, and Authority in the Kingdom, their Oppression, and Natural endeavour to Advance their own Ways in Religion, might

Tempt them to push forwards, and Struggle for the Right-hand of Fellowship; So as the Peace of the Nation might be Endangered.

I should here have closed up this discourse, did I not find that many Reverend Members of the Clergy, have been lately great Opposers of a Toleration; which leads me to Consider, whether the Admission of it be prejudicial to the Safety and Interest of the Church.

If we call to mind by what means True Religion was first Planted, & Propagated in the World, we shall find that Force, and Compulsion, had no hand in the Work: Both the Precepts, and Example of our Great Master, and his Disciples, are directly Opposite to it: For my part, I think, that Humane prudence, as well as Christian piety, Obliges their Successors to follow the same Method of reclaiming Dissenters *by Gentleness, and meek Exhortations*, according to the Direction of St. Paul.

For since the chief Designe and most incumbent Duty of the Church is to Convert Misbelievers, and to bring back into the Fold those who have strayed Away; there is nothing so Necessary and Conducing to this Work, as to procure in the Minds of Dissenters a good Opinion, and esteem of the Charity and Paternal Care of those, who undertake to Instruct them in the Right Way.

This was the Method of our Saviour himself, who began his great Business of Converting Mankind, by first Obliging the People with Temporal Blessings, that so he might Win them to Spiritual Happiness; for this Reason he Miraculously Fed so many Thousands in the Desert, and so often Cured their Bodily Infirmitys, in order to the Healing, and Nourishing their Souls: But the Infliction of Corporal punishment or pecuniary Mulcts, is so far from producing this effect of Love, and Esteem in their Minds, whom we are to make our Proselytes, that it constantly begets an Aversion, and Hatred in the Punished against the Authors and Promoters of this punishment, so that Churchmen must either necessarily give over the design of Converting Dissenters (which is a principal part of their Function) or the practice of Abetting the Infliction of Penalties upon them.

If Excommunication (which is a Seclusion from joyning with the Congregation in Religious Worship) be the proper, and just pun-

Punishment of Error in Religion, according to all the Primitive Rules, and Practice of Christianity, is it not strangely preposterous, that these Dissenters instead of being shut out, should be violently forc'd into the Church, and (even during their Non-Conformity of Judgment) be compelled to a participation in Divine Worship with the Faithful by all those sharp penalties, which the Law inflicts upon Recusancy? Instead of the Gospel Rule, which Commands us to avoid their company; we set up a Law of our own, which enjoyns our meeting together even in the House of God; whereby the party's compelled Act no less against their Conscience, than the Compellers against the plain Letter of Scripture. Methinks in this Case the Example of our Saviour ought to be our Rule, Who in person Whipt out of the Temple those, who came thither upon the Score of Interest, and not of Religion, but always used the most Benign and Gentle means imaginable to Win people into the Church.

What can be more contrary to the Honour, and Dignity of True Religion, than that it should appear to stand in need of Force to draw Men to it? We shew a mistrust of it's Verity, when we dare not leave Men the liberty of their Judgment and Conscience in imbracing it. Is not this that very Thing, wherewith formerly we have so often reproacht our Adversaries? and have we not other lawful Advantages enough over all Dissenters, and Sects without calling in the *Brachium Seculare* to Confute our Opponents, and using means much more, becoming a preaching Collonel of *Cromwells* Army, than a Prelate of the Church of England? Have we not Truth on our Side, the only Invincible Champion of Religion? Are we not *Establisht* by the Law of the Land, whereas others will at most be only Suffered? Are not all Ecclesiastical Promotions in our Power, and Occupation? So that having the strongest Motives on our side both Temporal and Spiritual, to bring Men fairly to us, why should we keep up a *Spanish Inquisition* of Force and Violence, and so discredit and Weaken our Cause, whilst mistakingly we endeavour by undue means to strengthen it.

Let the *Presbyterians* meet in their Halls, the *Fanaticks* in their Barns, the *Papists* in their Garrets; shall the Church of England Assembled in her Cathedralls, fear the Competition of Rivals every way so inferiour to her in force of Arguments, and Reason, in ex-

terior Decency, and Gravity, and in the Credit of Publick Authority? It would Argue not only want of Courage, but even Weakness of Faith, and Reason too, should we be Jealous, that a permission granted to those Sects, of having Publick Meetings would diminish the number of the Orthodox in our Religious Assemblys; for as all contraries are best set off, & distinguished, when together expos'd to Pub'ick View, we may Presume, that nothing would more advantageously fill our Churches, and Empty their Conventicles, than a Liberty given them to appear in a full Light; that so all Eyes might Judge of the Difference between Order, and Confusion, and between the Decency of our rational Worship, Modeld according to the best Patterns of sound Antiquity, and the Homeliness and clownish manner of their Addresses to Heaven, form'd out of their own Fancy by a Cynicall kind of Pride, which Scorns the Direction of their Primitive Guides.

Let us not therefore give them that only Advantage they have over us, which is of suffering for their Religion; for if we look into Scripture, we shall find that Persecution in the Sufferers, is one of the most conspicuous Marks of Truth, and in the Inflicters of Error; as most evidently appears in the Example of that great Apostle Saint Paul, than whom before his Conversion, none more Zealous, and fierce in the Prosecution of Christians, and after his Conversion, none more Compassionate, and Charitable, towards his dissenting Brethren the *Jews*.

THE END.